



**Directorate of
Intelligence**

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Zimbabwe: The Anatomy of Dissidence



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ALA 85-10069C
July 1985

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Zimbabwe: The Anatomy of Dissidence [Redacted]

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A Reference Aid

This paper was prepared by [Redacted] Office of African and Latin American Analysis, with contributions from the ALA Support Staff and [Redacted] also of ALA. It was coordinated with the Directorate of Operations. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Africa Division, ALA, [Redacted]

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Zimbabwe: The Anatomy of Dissidence [Redacted]

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Summary

Information available as of 31 May 1985 was used in this report.

This reference aid on the continuing armed dissidence in western Zimbabwe provides, [Redacted] a detailed look at developments in 1984. It also presents basic information on dissident activity since it began in March 1982 and on government efforts over the past three years to defeat the rebels. [Redacted]

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The historical record shows that the birth and growth of the dissident problem in Matabeleland is a direct result of the political and ethnic rivalry between the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and the opposition Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). The current wave of antigovernment dissidence in Matabeleland began in March 1982 following the ouster of ZAPU leader Joshua Nkomo from the government and the arrest of two top ZAPU aides, [Redacted] since that time the armed dissidents—whom we estimate to number between 600 and 1,000 men—have killed hundreds of people and destroyed millions of dollars in property. [Redacted]

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Harare has undertaken numerous large-scale—and in our view often repressive—Army sweep operations against the dissidents with little long-term success. Typical is that of early February 1984, when Harare launched a major antidissident operation in southern Matabeleland, imposed a dusk-to-dawn curfew, and blocked all food shipments into the area. Despite having employed over 10,000 troops, the curfew campaign failed to achieve any lasting military success; [Redacted]

[Redacted] press reports indicate that intimidation tactics like those used during the curfew campaign against the civilian populace have left much of the population in Matabeleland embittered and even more opposed to the government. [Redacted]

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Despite Harare's sizable commitment of men and material, its security forces have been unable to suppress the much less numerous dissidents, who almost certainly will continue to tax the military's resources. Nevertheless, we believe the government will continue to use the Army both as a military tool to stem highly visible dissident activity and as a political tool to demonstrate ZANU's power. [Redacted]

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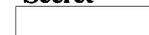
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Figure 1
Provinces and Selected Districts



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Zimbabwe: The Anatomy of Dissidence

Introduction

For over three years, antigovernment dissidents have disrupted the western provinces of Zimbabwe, sapping scarce government resources, undermining the confidence of commercial farmers in the region, and creating tensions with neighboring Botswana. We do not believe the dissidents now pose a direct threat to Prime Minister Mugabe's regime, although the government's heavy-handed response has fueled the traditional resentment between the Ndebele-speaking minority, mainly represented by Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), and the Shona-speaking majority who dominate the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU). The dissident problem shows no sign of abating, and we believe it is likely to disrupt Zimbabwean politics for some time.

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This reference aid examines the dissident problem in Zimbabwe and assesses government efforts to end it.

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Background

Dissident violence in the western provinces erupted immediately after Prime Minister Mugabe's decision in early 1982 to end his fragile ruling coalition with ZAPU. In February of that year he expelled Nkomo and two of his closest colleagues from the Cabinet, and the following month the government arrested Nkomo's top military aides. Mugabe justified the moves by publicly accusing Nkomo of plotting a coup, and he supported the charge by pointing to the discovery of large caches of arms on farms owned by

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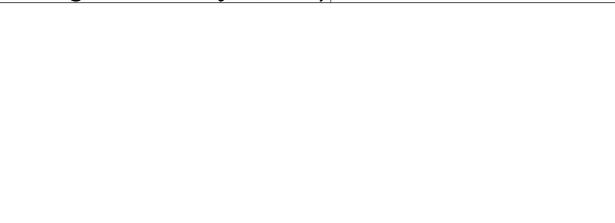
ZAPU. In our view, however, it is clear that Nkomo's ouster marked ZANU's decision to destroy Nkomo politically and to break the will of the remainder of the ZAPU leadership to resist absorption into a one-party state—a strategy that remains central to ZANU's dealings with ZAPU.² We believe Harare's allegations that the dissidents are directly controlled by ZAPU political leaders are untrue, and that they are intended to provide justification for suppressing Nkomo and his party.

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As the year progressed, the number of dissidents swelled with the large-scale desertions from the Army of former guerrillas of ZAPU's military wing, the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA), according to press reports. Many of the deserters took arms and ammunition with them, causing alarm among senior Army officers,

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We estimate that there are some 600 to 1,000 dissidents, most of whom are deserters and discharged ZIPRA soldiers who have taken up arms against the government. Moreover, we believe,

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that only half of the dissidents are active inside the country at any one time, and that the rest are in safehavens in remote rural areas or in Botswana.³

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The First Two Years

From the beginning of their activities in March 1982 through 1983, the dissidents increased their attacks on government and economic targets in an effort to demonstrate Harare's inability to maintain law and order and protect the civilian populace. Dissident attacks focused on symbols of central authority such as schools, clinics, and development projects. Cars, buses, and trains were ambushed and millions of dollars in government construction equipment destroyed. Isolated white commercial farmers were targeted by dissidents trying—successfully in the Kezi area—to disrupt the region's economic base. Indeed, by the end of 1983, all of the white commercial farmers in the Kezi area had abandoned or sold their farms because of dissident activity in the area, according to press reporting.

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The kidnaping of six foreign tourists in July 1982, with the abductors demanding Harare release all imprisoned ZAPU leaders and return confiscated property, was yet another effort by the dissidents to embarrass the government and gain publicity. The bodies of the six tourists who were apparently murdered shortly after their abduction were only recently unearthed in northern Matabeleland in March 1985, according to press reports.

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the dissidents were responsible for killing more than 40 white commercial farmers and 200 black peasant farmers from 1982 to 1983.

Beginning in March 1982, a curfew was imposed and Army troops were sent into Matabeleland to check the growing lawlessness and violence. The Army's crackdown became harsher and less disciplined during the summer as the search for the tourists continued, and there were numerous press reports of excesses against civilians. Security forces were finally

withdrawn from Matabeleland, and the curfew was lifted, in October. The popularity of Joshua Nkomo and of his Zimbabwe African People's Union appeared to have increased in the area, in the view of most observers, as the Ndebele rallied to him in reaction to the government's brutality.

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An increase in dissident violence in late 1982 and early 1983 provoked the government into a full-scale military campaign against ZAPU. The all-Shona, North Korean-trained 5th Brigade was sent to Matabeleland in January 1983 with a mandate to be "relentless in neutralizing dissident elements,"

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We believe 1,500 to 2,000 civilians died as a result of Army excesses, although some press reports of atrocities against Ndebele villagers cited a larger number.

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the government sought to eliminate ZAPU as a political organization as well as to end the dissident activity. According to press reports, 5th Brigade operations were aimed especially at young Ndebele men and ZAPU political figures. Government officials publicly called for action to "liquidate" the "dissident infrastructure"—a reference to ZAPU.

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The dissidents' use of neighboring Botswana as a staging area and Gaborone's reluctance to allow "hot pursuit" across the border have bedeviled bilateral relations, and, despite public denials, the Zimbabwean Army conducted several cross-border antidissident operations in late 1983, according to Embassy reporting.

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Dissident Operations

Strategy and Tactics

The objective of the dissidents, in our judgment, is to force the government to deal with them through ZAPU—the only political authority recognized by

most residents of Matabeleland—and thereby concede that ZAPU must participate in a national power-sharing arrangement. To accomplish this goal, the dissidents appear determined to force Harare to react in such a brutal and repressive manner that it will further alienate the Ndebele populace.

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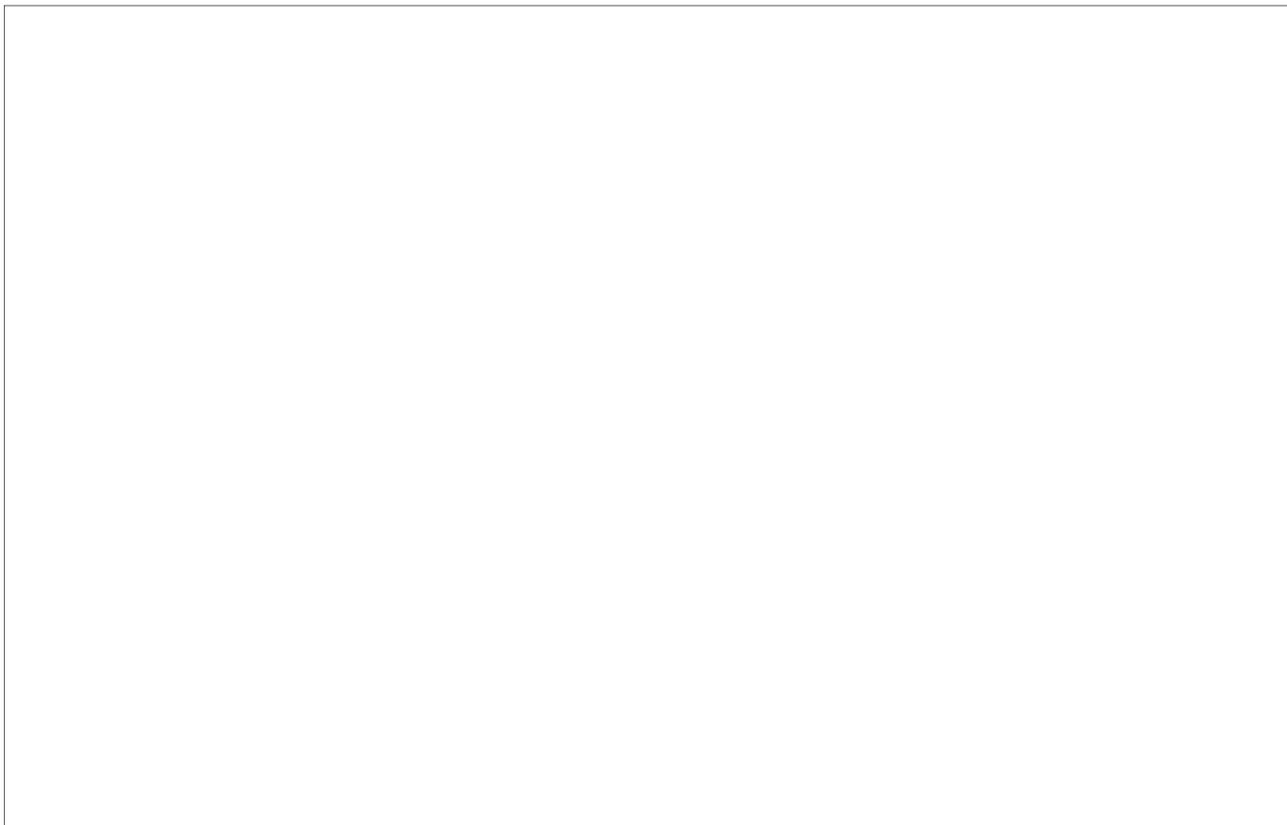
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Data compiled [Redacted] show consistent use by the dissidents of terror, violence, and political indoctrination in an effort to ensure popular support for their goals. Villagers suspected of working with the security forces or being members of ZANU are publicly labeled "sellouts" and beaten or killed as an example to others. [Redacted]

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effective representative of Ndebele interests. Moreover, much of the rural population probably perceives the dissidents as de facto representatives of ZAPU. Dissident efforts to politicize the masses before the national elections this year have increased dramatically since January, [Redacted]

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Popular support for the dissidents varies greatly within Matabeleland and Midlands. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] According to press [Redacted] the dissidents killed more than 120 people last year, including at least a dozen ZANU party officials. [Redacted]

[Redacted] In many districts throughout Matabeleland, the "mujiba" network⁵ established

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⁵ Mujibas were generally young boys who acted as the eyes and ears of the guerrillas during the Rhodesian civil war. They functioned as an intelligence and communication network providing information on security force movements and passing messages to guerrilla forces in the field. [Redacted]

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The dissidents also have attempted to mobilize the populace of Matabeleland by holding political meetings, [Redacted] At these meetings, they call for an end to ZANU domination and emphasize ZAPU's role as the only

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during the civil war has been revived [Redacted]

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[Redacted] Civilians have been invaluable in providing food and shelter—although not always willingly—for the dissidents are dependent on the locals for nearly all of their food. [Redacted]

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the dissidents successfully use the mujibas as scouts to help them avoid security forces. In an effort to end such support, the government has imposed prison sentences of up to three years for those failing to report the presence of dissidents to security forces, according to local press reports. [Redacted]

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Structure and Operations

Dissident organization varies widely, and command and control does not appear to be highly centralized. The ex-ZIPRA dissidents tend to be organized into well defined military formations [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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[Redacted] Other dissident bands, in our view, appear to be much more loosely organized and often break up and reconstitute themselves several times a year. Regional or area commanders probably are responsible only for their own units, although there seems to be some mutual definition of operational areas among regional commanders. [Redacted]

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Analysis [Redacted] indicates that individual operations are usually conducted by groups of five to 10, although the dissidents occasionally operate in groups of 20 to 30 for short periods. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] and [Redacted] at least 18 sightings of groups having between 30 and 60 members over the past year. We have no evidence the dissidents have a unified command and control structure, and the sightings of large bands of dissidents probably reflect short-term tactical coordination between smaller groups. [Redacted]

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The dissidents have an assortment of arms, including FN and G-3 rifles, light machineguns, and RPG-7 rocket launchers, but the most common weapon is the AK-47 assault rifle. Most of these weapons probably were left over from the civil war— [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

[Redacted] To feed themselves and obtain other supplies, including medicine, the dissidents often engage in criminal activity, mainly robbing the local population and rural clinics to acquire these badly needed supplies. Despite shortages of ammunition, the dissidents often ambush government patrols and were responsible for killing and wounding nearly 30 security force personnel in 1984, [Redacted]

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Government Strategy and Tactics

In our view, Harare lacks a comprehensive strategy for defeating the dissidents and instead has tended to pursue a series of ad hoc military responses to highly visible dissident activity. The basic antidissident tactics used by Zimbabwe National Army units operating in Matabeleland and Midlands Provinces are

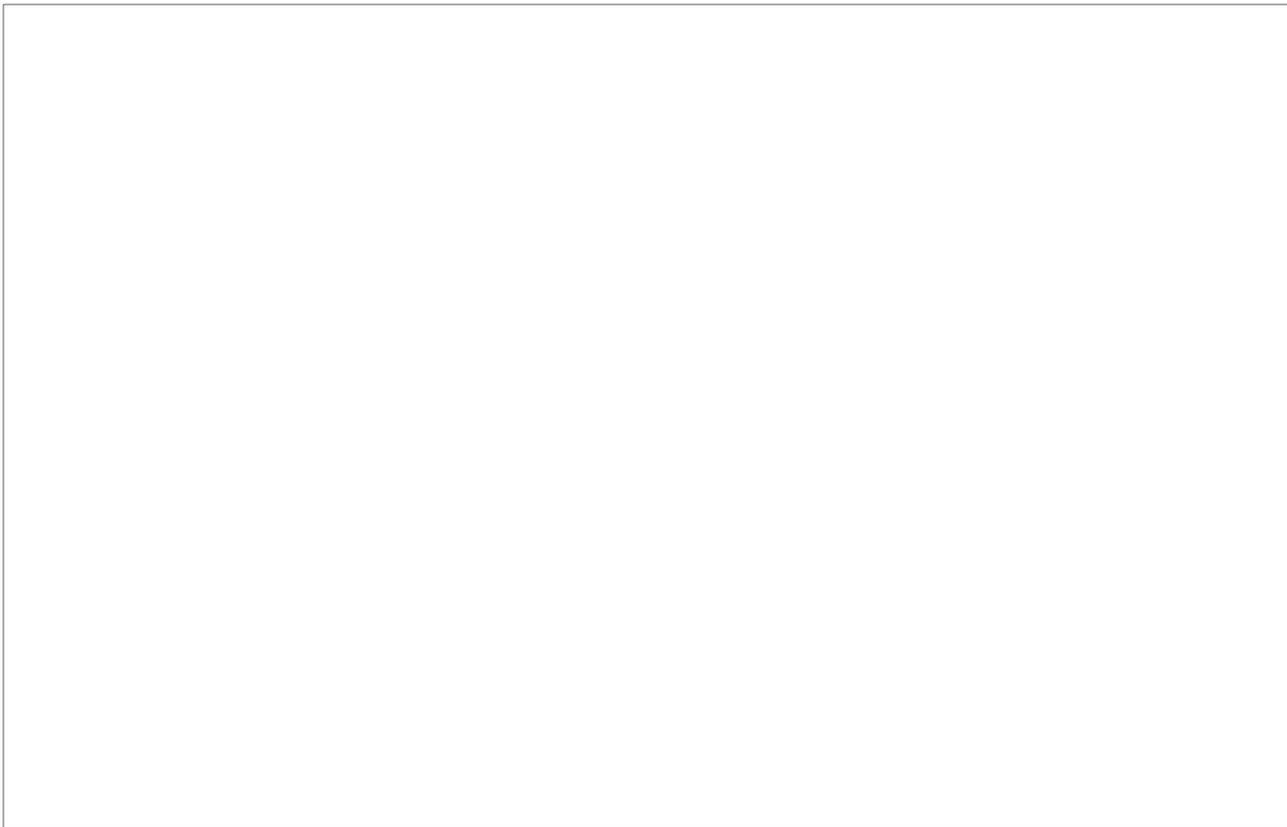
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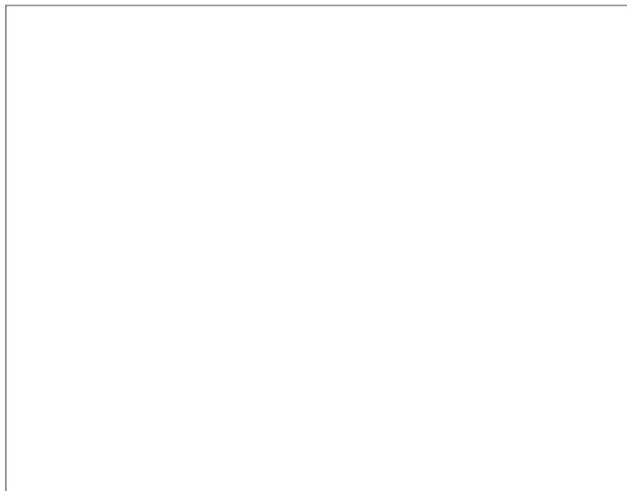
essentially those counterinsurgency tactics inherited from the Rhodesian Security Forces, [redacted] [redacted] For these tactics to work, well-trained specialized troops, a high degree of mobility, quick reaction, overwhelming firepower, and air support are required. [redacted]

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Harare's counterinsurgency efforts have not been successful over the past three years because the security forces have been unable to implement antidissident tactics effectively. The Army has encountered numerous logistics, equipment, command and control, and discipline problems. Elements of the Army's North Korean-trained Presidential Guard and 5th Brigade have been particularly notorious for their poor discipline and heavyhanded tactics, according to Embassy reporting. We have no evidence that the Zimbabwe Air Force flew any ground support missions in 1984 to assist the Army's antidissident operations in Matabeleland. In our judgment, helicopters have not been effectively used in Matabeleland since late 1983 because of equipment problems.⁶ The Army has been criticized by the Commercial Farmers Union for its slow reaction, basic inefficiency, and reluctance

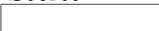
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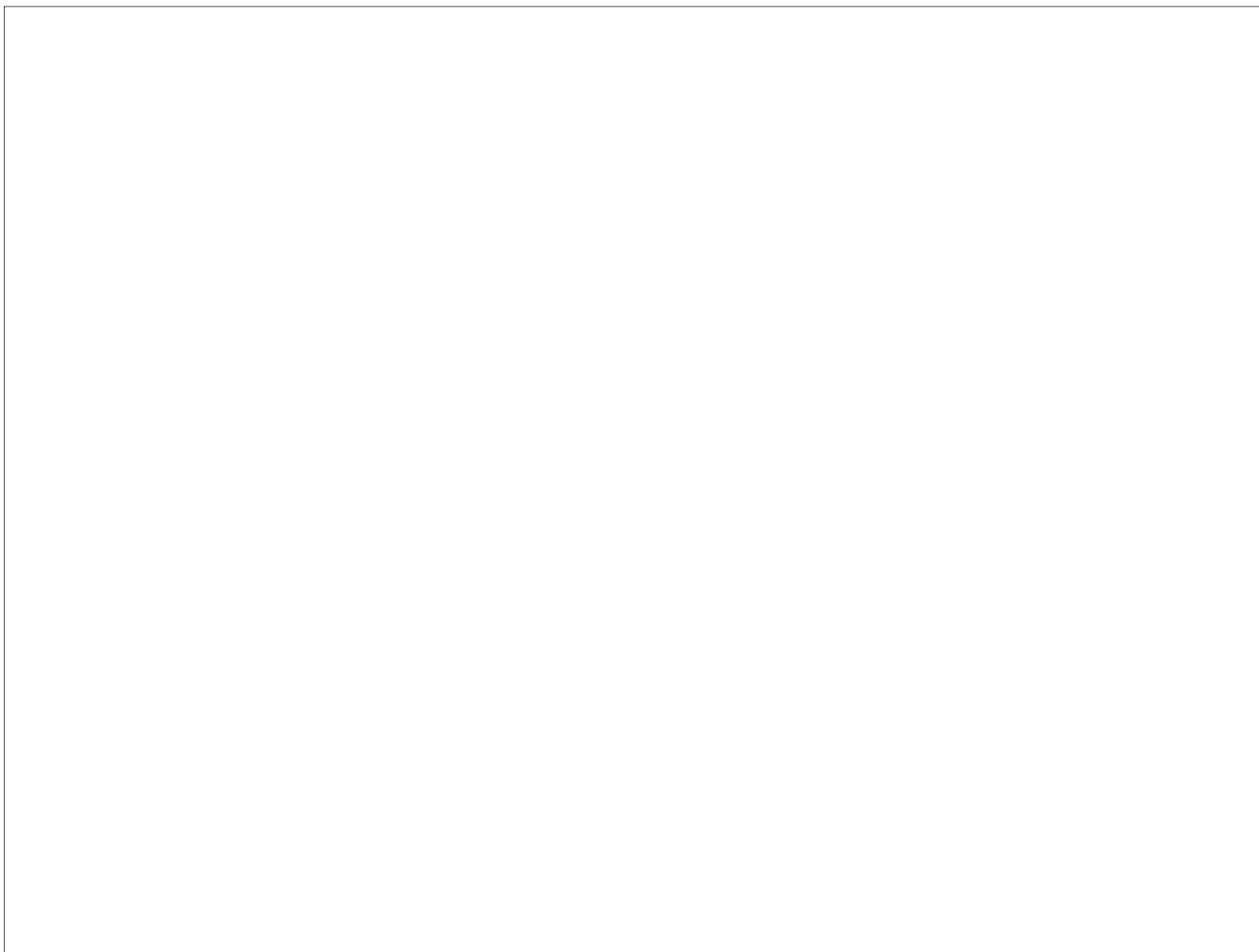
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by Army commanders to aggressively pursue dissidents, according to Embassy reports. [Redacted]

dissident collaborators. According to Western press reports, Harare maintains detention camps in Matabeleland North in the Tsholotsho, Nkai, and Lupane areas, where, according to these reports, young Ndebele men are beaten and tortured by government security forces. [Redacted]

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Because of such problems, Harare has been forced, in our view, to rely on large-scale sweep operations by ground forces conducting cordon and search operations, most often with limited success. During these campaigns the security forces have relied on mass arrests, interrogation of the local populace, and detention of suspected dissidents or dissident sympathizers, according to Embassy reporting. [Redacted]



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Harare continues to use emergency powers⁷ regulations to detain and hold suspected dissidents and

A Year in Review: 1984

⁷ The emergency powers regulations that Zimbabwe inherited from the Rhodesian regime, and renewed every six months since independence, confer extensive authority on the Home Affairs Minister and police, allowing them to override several constitutional guarantees. [Redacted]

Dissident Activity

The number of dissident incidents in western Zimbabwe showed a general decline early in 1984, peaked

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[Redacted]

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The Dissidents: Who Are They?

The "bandits," as the government calls the dissidents, are a collection of diverse individuals who have turned to armed dissidence for a variety of political and economic reasons:

- **Ex-ZIPRA cadres.** These individuals are former members of Joshua Nkomo's guerrilla army, the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA), who were demobilized or deserted from the Zimbabwe National Army. According to press reports, there were about 20,000 ZIPRA members at independence. These individuals appear to fall into two basic categories: those ex-ZIPRA cadre who profess loyalty to Nkomo, although not necessarily under his control; and those more militant ZIPRA members loyal to Nkomo's imprisoned former military commanders, Lookout Masuku and Dumiso Dambenzwa. (Masuku and Dambenzwa have been under government detention since their arrest in March 1982 on charges of plotting to overthrow the Mugabe regime.) We believe both of these groups are politically motivated and operate in well-organized, highly mobile groups.

[Redacted]

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- **Local dissidents and bandits.** These individuals, who rarely operate far from home, appear to be part-time dissidents who are able to exploit the poor security situation. They may portray themselves as fighting against domination by the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union, but their primary motivation in taking up arms appears to be economic. We believe this group is responsible for the majority of the criminal activity, and they tend to avoid confrontations with the security forces.

[Redacted]

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during the summer months, and then returned to the levels at the beginning of the year, [Redacted]

dissidents were responsible for initiating about 20 percent of all firefights. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

Curfew Campaign

In early February 1984, Harare launched a large-scale antidissident sweep operation in Matabeleland in an effort to reduce the high level of dissident

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[Redacted] in 1984 the

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activity in the area. The press reported that the government created a 4,200-square-mile restricted zone and imposed a dusk-to-dawn curfew on the estimated 250,000 to 450,000 inhabitants of parts of Beitbridge, Gwanda, Matobo, and Bulalima Mangwe districts of Matabeleland South Province. [redacted]

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[redacted]

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In an effort to convince the populace of the futility of supporting the dissidents, the Army blocked all movement and stopped all food shipments into what was then a drought-stricken region, according to press and Embassy reporting. [redacted]

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over 7,000 additional Army troops—including elements of the 5th Brigade, and of commando and parachute battalions—were deployed to the area from February to May, raising the number of government troops to between 10,000 and 12,000. The curfew was finally lifted in August, and the government publicly declared the campaign a success. [redacted]

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Thousands of people in the curfew area were taken to “screening centers”—like the one at Antelope Mine in the Kezi area—for interrogation and beatings, according to Western press reports. [redacted]

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[redacted]

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Despite having employed some 10,000 to 12,000 men for nearly four months, in our judgment, the curfew campaign failed to achieve any lasting degree of military success. [redacted]

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We believe Harare will continue to use the Army in Matabeleland both as a military tool to check dissident activity, as well as a political tool to demonstrate ZANU power in an attempt to undermine Ndebele support for ZAPU. Military campaigns to crush the rebels, however, probably will be ineffective at rooting out the dissidents from the midst of a largely sympathetic Ndebele populace. In our view, ZANU's efforts to reach a military solution to a political and ethnic problem will prove fruitless until Harare addresses basic Ndebele demands for some form of political power sharing. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

Military Outlook

In our view, Harare's actions during the past three years reflect a lack of a clearly defined military strategy to complement its political goals. Its intimidation campaign has been counterproductive, leaving many Ndebele people unalterably opposed to the Shona-dominated government and driving much of the rural population into the dissident camp. [Redacted]

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Despite a continuing major commitment of manpower and material, Harare's security forces probably will be unable to quell the dissidence in western Zimbabwe. Nevertheless, we believe that the government will be able to prevent the dissidence from spreading beyond its Ndebele base in Matabeleland and Midlands Provinces. Dissident activity probably will not endanger the regime as long as the dissidents are unable to threaten directly ZANU's base of support among the Shona population outside Matabeleland, or unless the dissidents receive substantial foreign assistance. [Redacted]

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